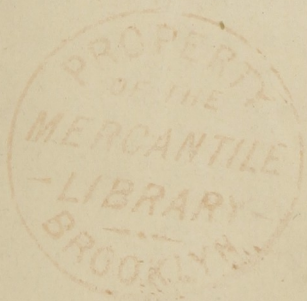


Notions of the Deaf and Dumb,

BY DR. PEET.



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NOTIONS OF THE DEAF AND DUMB BEFORE INSTRUCTION,
ESPECIALLY IN REGARD TO RELIGIOUS
SUBJECTS.*

By Harvey P. Peet, LL. D., President of the New York Institution for the
Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb.

THERE are, we suppose, few reading men who have not met with that curious anecdote, transmitted to us by Herodotus,† of the plan devised by an ancient king of Egypt (Psammetichus) to ascertain what was the original language of mankind, by causing two infants to be nurtured in such strict seclusion that, no words being uttered in their hearing, they could not learn a language in the usual mode, by imitation, and, it was taken for granted, must return to the original

* This Article appeared in the *Bibliotheca Sacra* for July.

† Of this anecdote we have met several different versions. The one here followed, being apparently a literal translation of the original, the reader will find in *Blackwood's Magazine* for April, 1845, p. 474. The Article to which it forms the text, is a very curious one, on the absurd attempts of certain Dutch and Irish antiquaries to deduce the ancient universality of their respective languages from the accidental coincidence of one or two words, and forced and far-fetched analogies of others. This word *beck*, happens to signify *bread* in Dutch, and *becker*, as with us, a *baker*. From this slight foundation one Goropius, in the sixteenth century, brought out huge folios to prove that the language of Phrygia was Dutch, and hence that the latter was the primitive speech of man.

speech of man. The sagacious monarch seems to have contented himself with obtaining a single word of the primitive language. The word *bec* (or *becco*), which, after some time, the children uttered when their attendant came in (some moderns have plausibly argued that they expressed hunger by calling for their foster-mother, a she-goat, by imitating the bleating of which, a sound like *bec* may have been produced), this word *bec* being on inquiry found to be good Phrygian for *bread*, the Egyptians thenceforward, waiving their own previous claim to be the most ancient race of men, admitted the Phrygians to be the oldest of nations; and their language the primitive speech of man.

We can never read this story without believing that it was part of the royal philosopher's design to ascertain also what was the original *religion* of mankind, though, on account of the failure of any satisfactory result on that point, this part of the experiment was hushed up.

It seems to be some such feeling as that of the old Egyptian king, that children, cut off from intellectual commerce with mankind, must have an instinctive language, and innate ideas of religion, that is at the bottom of the curiosity so generally felt, and the more strongly among the most intellectual and reflecting, to know what ideas the deaf and dumb have before instruction, and in what mode they express their ideas; for in the case of each child who comes into the world without the sense of hearing, and is brought up among persons unaccustomed to communicate by gestures, the experiment of Psammetichus, as every intelligent reader will perceive, both in regard to language and religion, is tried over again. It is to be hoped the greater light we now possess will enable us to draw more careful and rational conclusions than he arrived at.

Many, perhaps most, of the popular notions respecting the intellectual and moral condition of the uneducated deaf and dumb, are as wide of the truth as would be our conjectures respecting the religion, language and institutions of the inhabitants of another planet. On the former subject, however, the erroneous notions that prevail have their founda-

tion, not in the impossibility of acquiring correct information, but in the want of observation and reflection. It is natural to suppose that men and women of our own race, brought up among us, and externally not different from ourselves, must have not merely the *elements* of thoughts, feelings, and faculties like our own, but these thoughts, feelings, and faculties *developed* in the same manner that ours are. And the imitative character of the deaf and dumb tends to confirm this impression. When we see them act precisely like those around them, it is difficult to realize that they do not act from the same motives; or that their thoughts are not of a tissue similar to our own.

For instance, there are many who, if they should be introduced to a deaf mute said to be suddenly and recently restored to hearing, would consider it a matter of course that he should be able at once to speak, and to understand what is spoken to him. Yet a very little reflection would teach them that, as the power of speech is an acquisition of slow growth, requiring the diligent use both of the faculty of hearing and of the organs of speech for years; the child or man who, having been deaf from birth or early infancy, should have his hearing restored, would, in respect to speech, be, at best, in the condition of the infant who has not yet begun to speak; and might as reasonably be expected to understand Greek or Hebrew as his own mother's tongue. Such unreflecting people have not yet attained even the degree of intelligence that prompted the experiment of old Psammetichus, much less the sagacity with which good Duke Humphrey detected the impostor who, professing to have been born blind, and to have been, just before, miraculously restored to sight, yet named correctly colors he was supposed never to have previously seen.* To parody the duke's dictum :

Hearing restored may distinguish words; but suddenly
To understand them is impossible.

Others, moved by the destitution of the ordinary means of

* Shakspeare's King Henry VI., Part II., Act II.

religious instruction to which untaught deaf mutes are condemned, less irrationally, but, so far as all the facts now known prove, quite as erroneously, suppose that, in the case of some of these unfortunate beings, who, from the mere faculty of imitation, attend public and private worship with apparent enjoyment and devotion, God has made a special revelation of himself which only the want of language prevented the deaf mute from making known. Yet why should we look for special revelations to deaf mutes, when they are withheld from so many millions of heathens?

As there are thousands of deaf-mute children yet uneducated in our own country (to say nothing of other Christian countries), besides, alas! hundreds who have been suffered to outlive the hope of education, there are doubtless thousands to whom, as parents, or relatives, or neighbors of uneducated deaf mutes, or as pastors having such deaf mutes in one or more families of their charge, the moral and religious state of these unfortunate beings is a subject of deep and painful interest. Neither is their mere intellectual condition without great interest to every inquirer into the structure of the human mind. The phenomena presented by the mind in such circumstances of difficulty, and in great measure of isolation from the influence of other minds, furnish an *experimentum crucis* to test the merits of any given theory on certain important points in mental and moral philosophy. Philanthropy, religion, and science are thus all interested on the subject we propose to discuss.

To begin with language; it is hardly necessary to say that the phenomena presented by the deaf from birth, or early infancy, without a recorded exception, seem at the first view fatal to the theory that there is any spoken language instinctive in man's mouth. These unfortunate children spontaneously utter rude cries indicative of their emotions; but never articulate words; or, at least, never sounds that can be recognized as belonging to any known language of men; and this not from any defect or peculiarity in their organs of speech, for, with great and long continued labor, they may be taught to articulate after a fashion; but because the

acquisition of vocal speech, easily and rapidly made in flexible childhood, through the ear, becomes very difficult when that organ ceases to guide the voice. The deaf mute carries out the experiment of Psammetichus to a result of which the sage monarch probably never dreamed. Finding himself unable to learn the language of those around him, he sets himself to work, at first from instinct, and then from design, to make a language of his own, in his circumstances necessarily a language addressed to the eye, a language of motion and expression, that is, of gestures. This language he endeavors to teach to those around him; and greatly is the shadow resting on his earlier years lightened, if he can find companions ready in perception, gifted in mimicry, and kind in heart, who will learn his language, aid him to develop and improve it, and put it to such use as shall afford him some share of social enjoyment: implying, of course, a certain degree of moral and intellectual development.

It may not be aside from our purpose to venture a few remarks on the much vexed question of the origin of language; for there can be no religion where there is no language; and the condition of the uneducated deaf and dumb presents phenomena that may aid in elucidating the origin of the one as well as of the other.

That, as man had a beginning on the earth, so language also had a beginning, is the starting point of the inquiry. In the present stage of psychological science, we may assume as a fact proved by all experience, that there can be no considerable intellectual development without a language, whether of words or of gestures. And the converse holds equally good that there can be no language, worthy to be called such, where there is not a certain degree of intellectual development.

There are two rival hypotheses that have long exercised the dialectical skill of philosophers and theologians. The one party hold that the Creator made Adam a perfectly developed man, implying of course the possession of a language in copiousness, definiteness, expressiveness and harmony, adequate to his wants and capable of ministering to

his enjoyments. The other party hold that the first man came into the world in a state of literal *infancy*; of course without a language; and that speech, like the arts and sciences, has been gradually invented and improved from feeble, if not accidental, beginnings. Between these two extremes there are of course, various shades of opinion, but, in our view, logical consistency requires the choice of one or the other of the two theories we have stated.

To the unreflecting, speech seems as natural to man as his erect form. The first steps of philosophical research, however, show that men do not speak instinctively, but acquire language through the ear. A child born without hearing remains dumb; and a child even, losing hearing at an early age, becomes nearly or quite dumb. Nor is this owing merely, as was once supposed, to the sympathy between the nerves of the organs of hearing and of speech,* for there have been several instances of children born with all their faculties, who, having been lost or abandoned in deserts, are afterward found to have grown up possessed, perhaps, of acute hearing, but without anything like human speech.† Add that the total diversity that not only now exists, but has existed from time immemorial, between the languages spoken by neighboring races, as the Hindûs and Chinese, is hardly explicable on the theory of a common origin of languages; and a very fair case seems made out for the hypothesis of the gradual invention of speech. The arguments on the other side rest on deeper research and nicer observation.

There are writers who, admitting that all men learned lan-

* It was a dogma of the ancient physicians, said to have come down from Galen, that the conjunction of deafness and dumbness in the same individuals, was to be accounted for by "a common organic lesion of the lingual and auditory nerves, arising as they do from a neighboring origin in the brain."—See the able Article in the *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. LXI., p. 409.

† One of these cases was that of Peter, the Wild Boy, who was found in the woods of Hanover in 1726, and taken to England, where vain attempts were made to teach him language. He lived to the age of seventy. Another remarkable case was that of a boy of twelve found in the forest of Aveyron in France, about the beginning of this century. He also was destitute of speech, and all efforts to teach him failed.

guage from their elders, meet the arguments just stated by denying that ignorant savages, as men must have been without language, could possibly invent speech. Says Rousseau: "Speech could only have been instituted by a series of conventions; but how shall these conventions be established, unless the parties are already in possession of a language through which to communicate and mutually understand each other?" The solution of the difficulty, in the view of this class of writers, is found in referring the origin of each primitive language to a direct interposition of Divine power. Adam, they hold, learned a language ready formed, as his descendants do; except that in his case, the teachers were superhuman beings. And, if any languages exist wholly and radically distinct from the first language, a similar solution can no doubt be found for the difficulty. A literal interpretation of the Mosaic narrative concerning the confusion at Babel, is one of the most obvious.

It is singular, say other writers, that these reasoners, who hold that speech must have been divinely communicated to man, because the previous possession of a language is necessary to the invention of a language, should not perceive that their argument is confuted by the very fact of their own possession of speech. Every child who learns language from his mother's lips, establishes with her the supposed series of conventions, just as much as if two children should invent a language between them. The natural language of gestures is usually brought forward to solve this difficulty, for the gestures, actions and looks of those who speak, present an obvious and important aid both to a foreigner learning our language orally, and to a child learning his mother's tongue.*

But those who make the language of gestures the principal original interpreter of speech, overlook the case of children born blind, who learn speech as readily as those who see, though their ideas of the meaning of many words must at first necessarily be less clear and definite. To this we shall again recur. We have here only to remark that the theory

* See the North American Review for April, 1834; Article on the Education of the Deaf and Dumb.

of the original Divine communication of speech is neither philosophically necessary, nor even consonant with Scripture. The Scripture narrative represents Adam as giving names to all animals, not as learning them from any teacher whatever.

Setting aside the last-named theory, we have to choose between the two first mentioned, each of which has the authority of eminent names; of men of intense reflection and laborious research. Says William von Humboldt: "Speech must be regarded as naturally inherent in man; for it is altogether inexplicable as a work of his understanding in its simple consciousness. There could be no invention of language unless its type already existed in the human understanding." So far we can readily agree with him. But when the great philosopher adds: "Man is man only by means of speech, but in order to invent speech he must be already man," he must either mean by *speech* (as we often mean by language,) any possible means of communicating ideas, by signs whether audible or visible, or he must have strangely overlooked the phenomena presented by the deaf and dumb. The latter supposition is the most probable, especially as Humboldt is a German; for the Germans are slow to admit that the language of gestures can supply, to any considerable extent, the place of speech.

And yet, to those who are conversant with the deaf and dumb, and have studied their modes of thought and expression, nothing is clearer than that the language of gestures, in the improved and expanded stage which it soon reaches wherever a number of intelligent deaf mutes are collected together, is sufficient, not merely for the communication of all ideas whatever, that can be expressed by words; but also as an instrument of thought, and of moral and intellectual development. Man can not be man without some mode of communication with his fellows, sufficient not merely for calling, warning, entreating, threatening, for which the instinctive cries of many species of animals suffice, but also for narrating, describing, questioning, answering, comparing, reasoning. But there are multitudes of deaf mutes, capable of all this, and well developed mentally and morally, who

yet never heard and never uttered a word; and whose knowledge of the conventional signs for words, furnished by alphabetic language, was not a means of mental development, but an accomplishment, necessary to intercourse with those who hear and speak, which had to be slowly and laboriously acquired by explanation and translation in their own language of gestures. Some cases we know in which the mental and moral development has reached a point decidedly beyond the average of unlettered speaking men, where yet there is either a very slight knowledge of words, or even none at all.

While, then, we are ready to admit that speech is "the spontaneous result of man's organization, just as reason is,"* we must add that the language of gestures is also a "spontaneous result of man's organization." A language of articulation and intonation wakes sympathetic chords in the ear and brain; a language of gesture and expression equally speaks to the sympathies and *synideus* (if we may be allowed to make a word.) Widely different as are the two languages in material, in structure, in the sense which they address, and in the mode of internal consciousness by which their signs are received, and by which they are used as the machinery of thought and reasoning; still, either alone, once well developed, is sufficient for all the wants of the human intellect. If speech is better adapted to generalization and abstraction, and hence to reasoning; pantomime is superior in graphic power, and sway over the passions. The man whose language is a language of gestures, because by the want of hearing he has been cut off from speech, is still, not less than his brother who possesses speech, undeniably a man.

This assertion may surprise those who recall the fearful state of ignorance and degradation of which so many deaf mutes are painful examples. But the cause of this ignorance and degradation is not only the want of speech, but the want also of an improved and developed language of gestures.

* W. C. Fowler's *English Grammar*, etc., p. 18.

They were ignorant because those around them, either through dullness, stiffness, or indolence, were disqualified to aid them in developing their instinctive language of gestures to the degree necessary to enable them to profit by the experience of others, and to share in social communion. They were thus left without due exercise of the faculties in those years when that exercise is most important; and, above all, were cut off from all that mass of traditional knowledge of which language is the great store-house.

The language of gestures is, indeed, obviously less convenient than speech in many circumstances; as, for instance, in darkness, or with any other obstacle to vision; or, which is yet more important, in case of intent occupation of the eye and hand, with work in hand, or game, or enemies in front. Still, when we recollect that it is far more self-explanatory than speech, as is proved by the fact that every wanderer, cast among people of an unknown tongue, has instinctive recourse to such skill in pantomime as he can command, we are tempted to believe that the language of gestures, mixed, of course, with instinctive cries, was the language of the first men; and that the instinctive cries, from being merely auxiliary, became the nucleus from which spoken languages were slowly developed.

But, though the *elements* of the language of gestures, by being far less variable, and by admitting of much more obvious analogies with the visible forms and actions of objects, are far more generally intelligible among men of diverse speech, and hence seem more *natural* than the elements of any known, or even conceivable language of words; yet, on closer research, we shall find that speech is the more natural and instinctive, as well as the more convenient of two rival channels of thought and feeling. Children readily and spontaneously learn speech, because spoken words cling with a natural cohesion to the memory; because they are prompted by a natural instinct to utter sounds; in short, because the acquisition of speech is a natural exercise of organs and faculties given them to that end. The case of blind children shows that gestures, however useful, are

not *necessary* as interpreters of speech. And we have no evidence that there ever existed any community of men, not deprived of hearing, with whom speech was not in use at least as early as gesticulation.

Even deaf children, not less than children who hear, give natural and unconscious expression to their first feelings by utterances. In them, as well as in others, the cry of pain or of hunger precedes by months the gestures of anger or of supplication. Their inability to hear the speech of others is not the only cause of their becoming or remaining dumb. Their inability to hear *themselves*—leaving them unconscious of the sounds they utter—checks the natural overflow of thought and feeling by the muscles of the larynx, and turns it, except in moments of strong emotion, exclusively to the other natural channel, that of gestures and expressions of the eye and features.

The most remarkable instance on record of the instinctive expression of *ideas* (not *emotions*) by utterances, is found in the history of the blind deaf mute, Laura Bridgman. She has been observed to utter a distinct sound; in some cases approaching a monosyllabic word, in others a clucking or other inarticulate noise, for each of her acquaintances, and even to change this uttered name (of which she can be conscious only by the muscular effort of producing it), when she becomes aware of any considerable change in the individual to whom it is applied.*

We are not aware that such a fact is recorded of any deaf mute who can see, and hence it is, that we have before remarked, that the phenomena observed in *their* case *seem to* demolish the theory that any language of utterances, beyond mere emotional cries, is instinctive in man's mouth. But where deaf children are not objects of attention, these sounds will not be remarked, and, where they are objects of attention, the development of the visible language of gestures, as we have already observed, cuts off the other natural channel for the overflow of thought.

* See Dr. Lieber's paper, On the Vocal Sounds of Laura Bridgman, published in the Smithsonian Contributions to Knowledge.

Here we have doubtless the germ of that faculty by which, fully developed in the first man, he became possessed of spontaneous speech. In his infant descendants it is not developed, because there is no room for its development. Children who can not hear, are not conscious of its existence; and children who hear, have enough to do in learning words by imitation. The wild men who have been found in forests, where they had grown up with no more language than the wild beasts with whom they lived, and by some of whom they were probably at first nursed, may seem at first view an exception; but these, so far as we recollect, were all solitary; and it is unnecessary to remind the reader that a solitary child or man, having no use for language, far from being likely to form one, is apt to lose one already possessed.*

There are writers who attempt to describe the gradual formation of a language, beginning with mere instinctive cries of emotion, thence passing to single words or names, which, by the aid of the verb, are finally strung together in sentences, and made more definite by terminations or by particles. All this is ingenious; but wholly unsupported by any pertinent historical evidence. These writers affect to find "vestiges" of the successive stages of development through which they assume languages to have passed, in the different structures of the language spoken by different races of men.† But neither now, nor at any past time of which we have any authentic record, do we find a nation or tribe whose language has not passed through all the earlier and more difficult processes of its supposed formation. Tribes are yet found that, in respect to all other arts, and to all knowledge, are in as primitive a state as any progressive

* "Sir Kenelm Digby, in his *Treatise of Bodies*, mentions a remarkable instance of one John of Liege, who, from the apprehensions of danger from an approaching enemy, took refuge in a forest and was lost, where he remained so long that he lost the use of speech, and had to learn it again."—*Vox Oculis Subjecta*, p. 50.

† As a specimen of this sort of philosophizing, see a recent flippant and pretentious work, entitled "*Vestiges of Civilization*."

theorist can well dream of; but none whose language has not already, and, so far as we have any means of judging, ages since, passed far beyond the stage when all words were names, and the connection supplied by gestures.

We do not deny the possibility that men may thus form a language. On the contrary, we are inclined to believe that, if the subjects of the old Egyptian king's experiment had been kept in seclusion a few years longer, provided by being left together, they could have a taste of the pleasures and convenience of having a mode of communication, and could mutually aid and encourage each other in the formation of language; they would have added other sounds, more or less articulate, to the word *bec*; and thus would have gradually developed a dialect, imperfect no doubt, and requiring the aid of natural gestures, but yet with a considerable number of sounds resembling words. It is not improbable, as we may presently have occasion to show, that there may be savage tribes whose languages were thus formed. But if there be any languages thus formed, they must have been rapidly and spontaneously developed *pari passu* with the development of ideas in the first generation; for as the first ancestors of the tribe grew into rigid maturity of age, their modes of thought and forms of language would both crystallize into a determinate form, which, in accordance to a universal law of nature, would be impressed on the yet plastic minds of their children. The forms of the language being thus determined by some idiosyncrasy of the first progenitors, would henceforward remain nearly stationary for ages. Particular words change, assume new meanings, or are forgotten; but the grammatical forms of a language, unless broken by a mixture of races, and fused again into a new dialect, either remain substantially the same for ages, or, when they change, it is in a reverse manner to that which is implied by the theory of the slow formation of language during many generations. The changes of grammatical structure that history discloses are all changes from a more complex to a more simple structure. Some of the most ancient languages known possessed numerous inflec-

tions both of nouns and verbs. The modern languages derived from them have lost many of these inflections. Other ancient languages, as the Chinese, possessed no such inflections, and so have remained during thousands of years. Facts like these indicate that the first language was an inflected one, not a mere jargon of names without inflections or syntax.*

This monosyllabic and non-inflected structure of the Chinese language tempts us to conjecture, that this singular nation and singular language may have had their origin from a pair or more of children providentially cast out from human society while they possessed as yet, if any speech, but such a broken speech as is heard in the first efforts of children. This may, indeed, seem a more probable conjecture for the origin of a tribe of ignorant savages, than of a people so renowned for early civilization. There is, however, another mode in which a new tribe, or even nation, might take its origin; a mode in which, while totally cut off from all tradition either of the language or the historical lore of the race whence it sprang, it might still preserve a certain civilization and skill in the arts necessary to subsistence or comfort.

In all ages of the world there have probably been deaf mutes, for the words expressing this calamity are found in the most ancient languages known. Sometimes too, as we know, several deaf mutes are found in the same family or neighborhood. They are generally quick in learning all the arts that depend on the eye and hand; hunting, fishing, agriculture, and the mechanic arts. Their sexual instincts are often strong, and their passions violent. May we not suppose that, in some very remote period, while the greater part of the earth was yet an unpeopled waste, a pair of deaf

* The English has fewer inflections than the Anglo-Saxon; the Italian, French, and other languages of Southern Europe, than the Latin; the present dialects of India, than the Sanskrit. We are aware of no case in which a modern language has more varied inflections than the ancient language or languages from which it is derived. The Sanskrit, one of the most ancient languages preserved by writing, abounds in inflections beyond all others.

mutely, rebelling against the restraint of some patriarchal family dwelling on the very verge of human habitation, and feeling their own ability to provide for themselves, may have wandered off into the boundless uninhabited wilds before them, there to found a new race? A race so founded would doubtless present many remarkable peculiarities. While it might well possess a certain traditional skill in the arts necessary to its mode of life, perhaps far beyond the range of its inventive faculties; it would have lost all tradition of the true origin and early history of mankind; and would possess a language resembling no other language of men; a language, most probably, of few elements, and without inflections, for the idioms of the dialect of gestures used by the first pair would be apt to give such a character to it in its first stage of formation. And, we may add, in anticipation of that part of our subject, that a people of such an origin might very probably retain some rites of the external worship of the race from which they sprang, while utterly ignorant of its meaning and spirit.

We have presented these two hypotheses (of which we suppose the latter to be quite new,) to show that it is quite unnecessary to resort either to the older theory of the existence of the human race during generations in a savage or rather pre-savage state, with only the faint rudiments of speech, which developed differently in different tribes; or to the newer and more attractive, but equally unscriptural theory of a plurality of Adams and Eves placed in different regions; in order to account for the widest diversities of language (even if we suppose the confusion at Babel to have only produced differences of dialect,) or, if any weight be due to tradition on such a point, for the most contradictory traditions, as to the origin of mankind.

From the theory which we have advanced, it will naturally result that the language spoken by the first man, and inherited by his immediate descendants, having its origin in a fuller development of faculties, joined to more perfect flexibility of the organs of speech, was probably a more perfect and harmonious language than any that may since, by such

accidents as we have supposed, have had an entirely independent origin. And this primitive language we may easily suppose the stem from which all the languages of the Caucasian race have branched; thus accounting for the numerous points of resemblance among the languages of that race.

For we find in our philosophy no reason to reject the Scriptural doctrine, that the first man was the type of the highest perfection, mental and physical, of his descendants. Races of men sometimes improve, but, in other circumstances, they as notoriously degenerate. It is at least full as philosophical to suppose the inferior races of men to have been degenerate descendants from the superior races, as to suppose the converse. And those who hold that the Hottentot has gradually improved by migration to more favorable climates, till, passing through the intermediate grades, his remote descendants came upon the stage of life as a tribe of Caucasians, to be consistent, ought also to hold that the Hottentot himself was an improved offshoot from the Chimpanzee, and the latter from some remarkable baboon or monkey.

And such, as every reader will recollect, is the precise ground taken by that school of philosophers, represented by Lord Monboddo in the last century, and by the author of the noted work "*Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*" in this, who seem possessed with a monomania of accounting for all phenomena without reference to a First Cause, wherever, by any effort of speculative ingenuity, the necessity for such a reference may seem to be removed a step further back. *Their* theory of the origin of man and of language, however insufficient it may be, has at least the merit of consistency. They do not suppose the first man to have been created and left by his Creator in a state of bodily maturity and intellectual infancy, or rather imbecility. According to their views the first man, the last of a long series of successive developments from the first germ of life (which itself, in the view of some, was merely a product of a new chemical combination,) this first man, the lineal descendant of the *infusoria*, through the fishes, the frogs, and the monkeys, had

of course an infancy, as the orang-outang or chimpanzee, from whom he was born, had before him. An infant with orang-outang parents can not well be supposed to have any other language than the howling, chattering and mowing of his own father and mother; and marvellous as is the formation, in whatever number of generations, of a human language from such an origin, it is no greater marvel than the birth of a rational man from an irrational ape. The difficulty with this theory is, that in seeking to escape the necessity of admitting a direct interposition of Divine power, it supposes a series of metamorphoses, each a greater miracle, as measured by human experience since the record of history began, than is implied in the most literal interpretation of the Mosaic account of the creation.

According to all human experience, every oak sprung from an acorn; nor has an acorn been ever known to produce a tree of a different species from its parent oak. But geology teaches that there was a time when the earth was unfit for the growth of oaks. There must have been a first oak. Is it easier to conceive this first oak, in direct contradiction to all experience, to have sprung from the seed of some less perfect plant, than to conceive it, not in contradiction to, but simply in addition to, because beyond the reach of experience, as springing from the ground at the will of the Creator?

If it be granted that the first pair were created with *adult bodies*; possessed at once of that stature, muscular development, and power over their motions, which, in the case of each of their descendants, are only acquired by the slow growth and slowly treasured experience of long years of infancy and childhood; it can hardly be denied to be equally probable that they were created also with *adult minds*, that is, mental faculties, not, as in the case of infants, merely in the germ, but well developed, and possessed of an instinctive power of speech, which, in fact, is hardly a greater marvel than an instinctive power of walking to the nearest tree, and plucking fruit to satisfy the first call of hunger. Milton

makes Adam say, describing his first awakening into conscious life :

“ Straight towards Heaven my wondering eyes I turned,
 And gazed awhile the ample sky, till raised
 By quick *instinctive motion up I sprung,*
 As thitherward endeavoring, and *upright*
Stood on my feet ; about me round I saw
 Hill, dale, and shady woods, and sunny plains,
 And liquid lapse of murmuring streams ; by these,
 Creatures that lived, and moved, and walked, or flew :
 Birds on the branches warbling ; all things smiled ;
 With fragrance and with joy my heart o’erflowed.
 Myself I then perused, and limb by limb
 Surveyed, and *sometimes went, and sometimes ran*
 With supple joints, as lively vigor led ;
 But who I was, or where, or from what cause,
 Knew not ; *to speak I tried, and forthwith spake* :
 My tongue obeyed, and readily could name
 Whate’er I saw.”

And this fine description contains philosophy as well as poetry. The Creator can dispense, if it so please him, with the long infancy of the mind, as well as with that of the body. There is nothing in itself more incredible in the representation of the first man, as instinctively naming whatever he saw, than in his instinctively standing upright, and moving over the earth at will. None of his descendants, for long months after birth, can do either the first or the last. If a human being should be nurtured from infancy up to adult age without ever having been suffered to use his limbs, he would be as utterly unable to stand and walk, as he would be unable to speak, if from the loss of hearing or other cause, he should grow up without having ever exercised his organs of speech. And equally unable would he be to remember, think, and reason, if he had been always deprived of all opportunity of development and exercise of his intellectual faculties.

It is no serious objection to this view of the case that the possession of a language implies the possession of a considerable store of ideas, which can only be acquired by the use

of the external senses. The Scriptures inform us that Adam named "every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air," when brought to him. Evidently the names came spontaneously to his tongue, as a natural result of the perfect organization and overflowing energy of his organs of speech. We do not suppose that he ever used, or was conscious of possessing, a word for *elephant*, or *lion*, or *tree*, or *bird*, before he saw, and seeing tried to name those objects; or that he would have a word to express *love*, for instance, before he had experienced that feeling, which, of course, implies the perception of a beloved object.

The formation of a language of gestures by a deaf-mute child presents phenomena which may serve to illustrate the plastic power of a language in its vigorous and flexible youth. A sprightly deaf-mute child, once accustomed to have his pantomimic efforts received with kind interest, at the first sight of an elephant or a lion, will give this new animal a fitting sign-name; and, at the first perception of some new feeling, or mental relation, will devise some suitable mode of expressing it in pantomime. And his signs will be intelligible to his companions, if of quick perceptions, and accustomed to his mode of communication, provided they have seen the same objects, and experienced the same feelings, though the particular combination of signs made use of in the new case should be quite new to them. Can not we imagine that the Creator should endow the first pair with a power of speech as spontaneous, and to each other as self-interpreting, as the pantomime of the deaf and dumb still is? Is there any improbability in supposing that they were gifted with, as they needed greater propensity to, and facility in speech than is possessed by any of their descendants?

Whatever differences of opinion may obtain on the origin of language, there can be none that the possession or the capacity of acquiring a language is one of the surest tests of humanity. The want of a language in any adult being of admitted human origin, where the senses concerned in the use of language are not deficient, at once marks a low grade of idiocy. Language furnishes the machinery of the

intellect; it is the multiplier of mental power, the treasury of the accumulating experience and reflections of the whole race, and hence is the great means of intellectual progress for the human race, as well as for each individual man. Another prerogative that distinguishes man from the most sagacious of the mere animal creation, a prerogative yet higher than language, and hardly less universal, is religion. As there is no known tribe of men without an articulate language, so there is hardly one without a religion, that is, without traditions more or less distinct, and having more or less sway through the conscience, on opinion and conduct; of a God and of a life beyond the grave.

This general consent of mankind on certain fundamental points of religious belief, is accounted for, as we have seen is the case with the general prevalence of articulate speech, in two different ways. One class of philosophers and theologians hold, that whatever knowledge on such points is possessed by nations on whom the light of revelation has not dawned, is derived through dim traditions, transmitted from the remote patriarchal times. Another class regard the crude notions of the heathen on religious subjects as the spontaneous development of man's religious nature; which they hold, leads every man, or at least every community, at a certain stage of mental and moral development, to recognize a God in His works, and infer the soul's immortality from the instinctive horror with which we recoil from the idea of entire extinction of being.

The two theories have this in common, that they take for granted that certain elements of religious belief are natural to the human mind. If man were not so constituted that a belief in a God and in a future life is accepted and clung to, as consonant with his nature, religious traditions could never keep such firm hold of the popular belief through countless generations. But when we say that the vine reaches to and twines round the stake, when presented to it, we do not mean that the vine can make its own support, or without painful and random trailings along the ground, reach a distant support; it but accepts the nearest support offered to it.

The human mind (with rare exceptions) instinctively accepts and clings to the great truths embodied in the words, God and Immortality: does it follow that these truths are so near and open to human apprehension that the mind, in its vague and unaided reachings forth, can discover and grasp them?

It is in this point of view that the inquiries into the notions of the uninstructed deaf and dumb possess the greatest interest. The results of these inquiries we now proceed to give.

A series of questions as to their ideas before instruction on religious and other analogous subjects, was recently proposed to the members of the three most advanced classes in the New York Institution for the Deaf and Dumb. The answers obtained were entirely their own, both in thoughts and in language. We here present a sufficient number to give a just idea of the whole.

Question 1. "Had you, before instruction, any idea of a God, or of any being in the sky, more wise and powerful than man? Did you consider this being as benevolent and just, or as powerful, cruel and awful?"

Answer. "Before instruction I had no conceptions with reference to the character of God; my grandmother and her daughter endeavored to instruct me, and make me understand that God was good and powerful, but I did not obtain any clear idea. They taught me in signs that the eye of God was so great that he could perceive with ease and quickness. When I learned the letters of the alphabet with one hand, a good lady pointed to some letters in a thin pamphlet, saying 'God is good,' but I did not clearly understand what this meant until the dawn of education beamed upon me."

"No, Sir, I had no idea of God."

"I thought that some one was in the sky. I feared that he was powerful and wise, because he turned a grindstone, and made it thunder and lighten."*

* This idea, though less poetical, is not more unphilosophical than the Homeric notion of thunderbolts forged on Vulcan's anvil.

“Before I was instructed I had no idea of God, but I thought that some one caused thunder and lightning over the earth, which quaked.”

“I had no idea of any being more wise and powerful than man.”

“I knew nothing of God. I had no idea of considering his character.”

“Yes, Sir, I had an idea of God before I came to school. During my stay at home, my mother often told me that God was good, but I had not much knowledge about him.”

“Nothing of a being in the sky more powerful than man, was known to me till my brother told me through gestures that he was of greater strength and height than we, and put the corpse of a wicked man to the bottom of a hollow place and then burnt it; and would take a dead person possessing goodness into the sky. My feelings were divided between fear of the being and determination to be good, so that I might be taken by him to his abode in the sky. On my mother’s return home from a visit, she, being informed by him that he had taught me of the being, confirmed the statement.”

“I had but a very imperfect idea of God originally imprinted on my mind by my mother, who gave me, through signs, the impression that he was entirely made of iron, by pointing to the stove round which we were sitting one Sabbath morning in winter; and that he was enthroned on high, by placing herself in an arm-chair and touching it and pointing upward, as if something resembling it were elevated above the blue azure vault. As far as I can remember, I thought that he was more powerful than man, and that he would be highly offended and extremely angry should I ever do anything disagreeable or offensive. After the most intense reflection, I can hardly say whether I ever thought he was benevolent and just or not.”

“Before instruction, I never had any conception of God, or of any being in the sky more wise and powerful than man.”

“I had, before being instructed, no idea of God, nor of

any being more wise and powerful in the sky than a man in the world, but I was taught in French by my nurse in Paris that there was such a being called 'Dieu.' I considered the being very cruel. While I was on the wharf at Beaufort with my father, when quite a boy, we were waiting for the coming of a steam-boat. It was an exceedingly hot day and we were out of patience. I told him that 'Dieu' was very cruel."

"I have no recollection of having formed any idea that there was a God, or any other being superior to man."

Extracts like the foregoing might be multiplied indefinitely. Thousands of deaf mutes in Europe and America, after becoming able to give an account of their early thoughts, have been questioned as to their ideas of God; and their answers have been perfectly uniform in the point that no one of them ever originated the idea of a Creator and Governor of the world from his own unaided reflections. What ideas some of them had attached to the word God, pointed out to them in books, were derived from the imperfectly understood signs of their anxious friends, or from pictures. In this way, many of the deaf and dumb acquired the notion that there was a great and strong man in the sky, a being to be feared rather than loved. Others received from pictures the notion that the being, so often pointed to in the sky, was a venerable old man, with a long beard and flowing robes. For instance, Massieu, the celebrated pupil of Sicard, gave the following account of the impressions he received from the attempts of his parents to make known to him the existence and the duty of worshiping God: *

"My father made me make prayers by signs, morning and evening. I put myself on my knees; I joined my hands and moved my lips, in imitation of those who speak when they pray to God."

"In my infancy I adored the heavens and not God; I did

* Those who may wish to read in full this interesting account of his own infancy by Massieu, may refer to Sicard's "Théorie des Signes," to Bébien's "Journal des Sourds-Muets et des Aveugles," (I. 333), or to the Appendix to Akerly's "Elementary Exercises for the Deaf and Dumb," [New York, 1826].

not see God, I saw the heaven (the sky). When I prayed on my knees I thought of the heaven. I prayed in order to make it descend by night upon the earth, to the end that the vegetables which I had planted should grow, and that the sick should be restored to health."

When asked if he gave a figure or form to this *heaven*, Massieu replied: "My father had shown me a large statue in a church in my country; it represented an old man with a long beard; he held a globe in his hand; I believed that he dwelt beyond the sun." Massieu further relates that he felt joy when his prayers were answered to his wishes; and, on the contrary, was accustomed to threaten heaven with angry gestures when he saw that hail destroyed the crops, or his parents continued sick.

It should be understood that the failure of so many anxious parents and relatives of uneducated mutes to impart to these unfortunates any correct or consoling ideas on religious subjects, is owing, not to any want of adaptation in the language of gestures for the communication of such ideas, but to their own want of skill in its use. As it exists in our institutions, this language is fully adequate to the clear and vivid expression of religious truths.*

Questions, 2. "Had you any idea that the world was created; that some wise and powerful being made plants, animals, men, and all things?"

"Did you every try to reflect about the origin of the world and its inhabitants?"

Answers. "I had no idea that it was created by the word of God, and never thought of the origin of the world."

"No, I had no idea about it. I did not think of the first inhabitants of the world."

"I had no idea of the creation of the world, and that plants, animals, and all things, and men were made—No, Sir."

* The rude and uncultivated dialects of gestures generally serve only to recall ideas with which both parties are already familiar. It requires an improved dialect, and a master in its uses, to impart new ideas, especially if elevated and intricate.

“I did not know that it was created, but I felt as if it existed. I thought that plants, animals, men, and all things made themselves. No, I never endeavored to reflect about the origin of the world and its inhabitants.”

“It was my opinion that the sun created the world, and all things, and animals, and the farmers caused the plants and vegetables to grow up. I never tried to reflect about the origin of the inhabitants.”

“I can not recollect anything of what I thought with regard to the manner in which the world, and plants, animals, men, and all things were made. To the best of my recollection, I never tried to reflect about the origin of the world and its inhabitants.”

“My ideas of the creation of the world, plants and other things were enveloped in the darkness of ignorance, till my dormant faculties were enlightened by the dawn of education when I came into the New York Institution for the Deaf and Dumb.”

“I had no idea at all that the world was created, or that some wise and powerful being made plants, animals, men, and all things, as I thought they had ever been and would ever be in existence, and that the world was an endless level plain. It is impossible for me to assert whether I had ever tried to reflect about the origin of the world and its inhabitants.”

“No, Sir; I thought that some animals came from the south to this country, where they staid till the winter, when they flew away to the south, but some animals were born here. I believed that some great things raised themselves. I did not know that God made plants, but persons gathered some in the fall and kept them till spring, when they planted seeds in the earth. The seeds grew up by the influence of the water which some women poured upon them. I tried to think (about the origin of the world and its inhabitants) but could not do it. I thought that the inhabitants came from the south.”

The writer of the last cited answer, it will be seen, was the only one that “tried to think” about the origin of the

world and its inhabitants. It is worthy of remark that her education did not begin till she had attained the age of fifteen, and she had thus more time before instruction to "try to think," or to attempt to make original theories, than most of the others whose answers are given above, who generally came to school at eleven or twelve, or even earlier. With deaf-mute children, unless their friends are skilled in the language of signs, the reflective powers usually develop much more slowly than with children who hear; because the possession of signs for those ideas that are beyond the sphere of direct intuition, and the exercise of the faculties by intercourse with other minds, are necessary to any considerable development of those powers. The dialect which a deaf mute, with the assistance of his relations and playmates, invents to serve for necessary and simple communications, is usually too meagre, imperfect, and often ambiguous, to favor the development of the higher intellectual faculties. And if these faculties are slowly and imperfectly developed, we should rationally expect, what appears to be the fact, that few, if any, of these unfortunate children seem ever to have reflected on the origin of the universe, or on the necessity of a First Cause for the phenomena of nature. As one of them expresses it, they "thought it was natural" that the world should be as it is. Some even fancied that those whom they saw to be old, had ever been so, and that they themselves would ever remain children. Those who had learned, by observation and testimony, the general law of progress from infancy to old age, supposed, if they attempted to think on the subject at all, that there had been an endless series of generations. But probably there are very few uninstructed deaf mute children of ten or twelve who have reached such a point of intellectual development as even this idea implies. At least, we do not recall more than one case in which a deaf mute has professed to have had such an idea, and his recollections did not seem to be clear.* It is much easier to

* "I believe I used to think that this world stood itself always, and that the people, too, were descended from generation to generation without origin."—Twenty-second Report, American Asylum (1838,) p. 17.

give to a deaf mute, by means of rude and imperfect signs, the idea that there is some powerful being in the sky, than to explain or even hint that this being made the world.* Hence it is that very few deaf mutes have ever acquired, either from their own reflections or from the imperfect signs of their friends, any idea of the creation of the world, or even of the plants and animals on its surface. Nor need this surprise us when we reflect that the most enlightened nations of antiquity had not mastered this great idea. Ovid, writing in the learned and polished time of Augustus, expressed the popular belief of his time in the theory, that all things were produced by the due union of heat and moisture. †

Many deaf mutes, however, whether from their own meditations or from misunderstanding the signs of their friends, have acquired child-like ideas respecting the causes of certain natural phenomena; such as rain, thunder, and the motions of the heavenly bodies. Quite a number supposed that there were men in the sky, who, at certain times, made themselves busy in pouring down water and firing guns. The notions of deaf mutes on such matters are often amusing enough, but when not derived from a misconception of the signs of their friends, ‡ are evidently formed in a spirit of analogy, which, indeed, has a great effect on the formation of their language of gestures. Where there is a resemblance in effects, they naturally suppose a resemblance in causes. An English deaf-mute boy, § observing that he could raise quite a strong wind with his mother's bellows, naturally concluded that the wind that sometimes blew off his cap in the street came from the mouth of a gigantic bellows. Neither does it

* "When I saw a large stone, I asked a friend of mine how it came. She pointed to heaven, but I did not know what it meant."—Ib. p. 14.

† Quippe ubi temperiem sumpsere humorque calorque
Concipiunt; et ab his oriuntur cuncta duobus.

Metamorphoses, l. 8.

‡ One girl, probably from misunderstanding the signs of her friends, had imbibed the idea that the priest made rain.

§ "A Voice from the Dumb," by W. Sleight of Brighton. Other deaf mutes say they fancied the wind was blown from the mouth of some unseen being. This notion may have been derived from pictures.

seem that this belief was troubled by his inability to find the operator or the location of this bellows, for to one whose sphere of observation was so limited, and who could learn so little of the world beyond it from the testimony of others, the region beyond a circle of a few miles, was as wholly unknown, and as open to the occupancy of imaginary giants and engines, and other figments of the imagination, as was ever the land of the Cimmerians to the Greeks, or the Fairy Land to the popular belief of the Middle Ages. Similar to this was the notion already given, of a girl who seems to have imagined that the plants which spring up annually in the fields and woods were, like those in her mother's garden, planted and watered by "some women;" an infantile conception in which, however, may be traced the first germ of the old Greek notions respecting nymphs and dryads.

A few more of these infantile attempts to account for the phenomena of nature, may be acceptable to the reader. One lad, struck with the similarity between flour falling in a mill, and snow falling from the clouds, concluded that snow was ground out of a mill in the sky. Others supposed that the men with whom their imaginations, or their misconceptions of the signs of their friends, had peopled the sky, brought up water from the rivers, or from some large neighboring sound or lake, and dashed it about from pails or tubs, through holes in the heavenly vault. The more general belief, however, seems to have been, that there was a great store of rain and snow in the sky, a matter no more to be wondered at than the abundance of earth and water below. Some supposed thunder and lightning to be the discharges of guns or cannon in the sky; a notion the converse of that well-known one of the savages who, when they first met in battle a European armed with a musket, believed they had encountered a God, armed with thunder and lightning. Others say that they believed lightning to be struck from the sky with iron bars, a fancy rather more difficult to account for than the other, though they had doubtless remarked the sparks struck by iron from stone.

In answer to the question whether they had any idea how

the sun, moon, and stars were upheld in the sky, the uniform reply was that they had never thought about it. It seems as natural to children that these bodies should keep their places above us, as that the clouds or the sky itself should. One lad had imagined a hole through the earth by which the sun could find a passage back to the east. Others supposed that after setting, he continued his journey round under the northern horizon to the east again. There were even some who supposed that a new sun rose every morning, and was extinguished at night!

They all believed, of course, that the earth was flat. No one will wonder at this, for there are still many people, possessed of the advantages of speech and hearing, who on this point have not yielded the testimony of their eyes to the demonstrations of science.

The stars, in the view of many, were candles or lamps, lighted every evening for their own convenience by the inhabitants of the sky; a notion very natural to those who had had opportunities of watching the regular lighting, at night, of the street-lamps of a city. The moon was, to most of those whose answers are before us, an object of greater interest than any others of the heavenly bodies. One imaginative girl fancied that she recognized in the moon the pale but kind face of a deceased friend. Others thought that she continually followed them and watched their actions, moving some to "make saucy faces at her," and others to run and hide themselves in the fear that she would seize and cruelly treat them.* These were, probably, only momentary fancies. The greater number looked on the moon with pleasure, or at least without dread. Some say they believed she loved them.

The answers of some of them, from their imperfect command of language, probably express more than they in-

* A pupil of the Hartford School wrote: "I had some faint idea that there was one in the moon who looked on every one of us, and would take any one that was angry or bad in some ways to his prison for life."—Twenty-second Report, American Asylum, p. 14. Other deaf mutes have related similar fancies of their early years.

tended; and, in several cases, their recollections of the ideas they had before instruction may have become mixed up with, or colored by, the ideas they have acquired since. It is difficult to judge how much the girl meant who professes to have had an opinion that "the sun created the world," and the difficulty is not diminished by the incoherency of the different parts of her statement. She may have observed that the sun caused the annual disappearance of snow and return of animal and vegetable life.

The answers to the question: "Had you any idea of the existence of the soul, as something distinct from the body, and which might be separated from it?" were so uniformly in the negative, that it is unnecessary to quote more than two or three, *e. g.*, "No, Sir, I had no idea of the soul." "I had not the least notion of the existence of the soul." "I had no understanding of the existence of the soul; but now I understand that the soul exists in every person, and when death seizes them the soul is immediately separated from it" [the body]. The replies of pupils of the American Asylum to a similar question were to the same effect. One of them will serve as a specimen of the whole. "I had not any idea of my own soul nor of any spirit whatever."

It is remarkable that only one out of more than forty whose statements are before us, seems to have imbibed any of the popular superstitions respecting ghosts. If the misfortune of the deaf and dumb prevents them from learning much truth, it also protects them in most cases from receiving those early impressions of superstitious terror and folly which it is often so difficult to get rid of in later life.

Question 8. "What were your thoughts and feelings on the subject of death? Did you know that you must yourself die?"

Answers. "I had terrible dreams about death, which stimulated me to take some possible means to save my life from being destroyed, by hiding myself under the ground."

"I can not recollect that I thought I must die myself."

“I had always regarded death with painful terror and superstition; it seemed to me an unnatural and ghastly thing, and a sort of punishment inflicted on bad human beings. I did not know that I must die like others, nor that all must die.”

“I considered death as an unpleasant subject of reflection, and hated it from the bottom of my heart, but could not help dreadful reflection on it whenever I saw man or animal die. I knew it was the extinction of human, as well as animal life, but had no idea that all men, animals and vegetables must come to an end. When I saw men and animals die, I had no feelings of sympathy toward them, as I usually thought they were killed by taking things that were destructive to life, and was so much afraid of it [death] that I formed a resolution to defend myself against its baleful effects, expecting never to be its victim in all my life.”

“My thoughts were that a person would never appear in life after his death. I was afraid of death. I did not think we must all die. I had an idea that I should possibly die.”

“I thought death awful and terrible, and my feelings on it were great and painful. I guess that I had thought that I myself must die.”

“I often saw the old people failing till they died and were buried in the grave, but I did not fear it, because I would not die like them.”

“I really knew that I should myself die, as my dear friend Mrs. S. R. D. often told me by the signs that I should die, and would be taken from the grave to be in a happy place up where she pointed with her hand; but I knew nothing about God and heaven.”

“I did not know, but I cherished the hope that I was not appointed to be caught by sickness or death. I did not know that I myself must die.”

“Yes, Sir, I thought that death was God and I knew that I would die, but I was in a deeply fearful sorrowful manner in which I thought I should never see my parents hereafter.”

“Before I came to be educated, the subject of death

affected my thoughts and feelings. I considered it to be the most dangerous of all calamities, and sometimes dreaded it. I generally thought that I should never die, but live for eternity."

From these extracts, and similar ones might be indefinitely multiplied, it will be seen that to most of the uneducated deaf and dumb, death is truly the king of terrors. Those who had not been taught the contrary by the signs of their friends, cherished the belief that they could evade the power of death, and live on forever. We have heard of a lad who, having observed that people who died had taken medicine, resolved to abstain from medicine, as well as other hurtful things; and it might in some cases be well if those who are not deaf and dumb were equally prudent.* Other deaf mutes are recorded to have been unwilling to betake themselves to their beds, when unwell, from having observed that those sick persons who kept their beds generally died.

Other deaf-mute children, of less experience, or of a happier temperament, profess to have had, or at least to be able to recollect, no thoughts or feelings on the subject of death. Some state that all that troubled them at the sight of a corpse, was the weeping of those around them.

To the question whether they were ever led by dreaming of a deceased person to suppose that that person, though dead and buried, yet lived, thought, and felt somewhere; the general reply was, that they recollected no such dreams. A few recollected having dreamed of the death of friends whom on awaking they found alive.

So far as we can learn from their statements, none of the deaf and dumb have originated the idea of the existence of the soul after death, in a state separate from the body; and it is only in rare cases that their friends have had skill in the language of gestures to impart to them any correct notions

* A pupil of the Hartford School had formed the notion that "A doctor wished to give poison to sick persons that they might die." The reader will recollect that savage tribes have at times risen in fury and murdered missionaries, because the sick to whom they had given medicine had died. A dreadful tragedy of this kind was enacted in Oregon, in November, 1847.

on that point. The attempts made for this end by many anxious parents, have at most given the child-like idea that the dead are taken from their graves bodily into the sky, or are bodily thrown into a fire. We have seen that one lad derived from his brother's signs the idea that the corpse of a wicked person was burned in "a hollow place." Of a like character were the early impressions of certain German deaf-mutes, recorded by one of their number, O. F. Kruse of Schleswig, that the bodies of the good remain uncorrupted in the grave, where they only slumber to be hereafter awakened; while those of the wicked rot and become the prey of worms. It is easy to understand that children, who have never seen a corpse except in the brief interval between death and burial, may suppose that the dead only sleep in the grave. One of the pupils of the New York Institution had been haunted by the terrible idea that, should she die and be buried, she might awake in the grave, and would be unable to call for help. Kruse describes the shock to his feelings when he first, by seeing a skeleton, came to know that the body returns to dust in the grave.

Question 10. "What did you think when you saw people assemble at church every seventh day? or when you attended family prayer?"

Answers. "I could not understand what it meant."

"I often thought why people assembled at church every Sabbath-day, but I did not know what they did so" [*i. e.* for what reason.] "I never attended family prayer, only prayer meeting."

"I don't recollect." (Several answered to this effect.)

"I do not know what I thought." (This also was the answer of several.)

"I often saw people assemble at church, but I did not know what it meant."

"I did not think about the church before any one taught me."

"I thought people were fond of attending on church, but I did not know why they used to have family prayer."

"I thought that they loved to read the Bible, and to hear

their preacher speaking, but I did not understand why family prayer was attended.”

“ I assure you that I had no thought of the people’s assemblage at the church as if a stone were in my head.”

“ I thought that the people were in the church to worship the clergyman of the highest dignity and splendor.”

“ I thought that the people assembled at the church with great pleasure in studying various branches of knowledge, and thought that the family played.”

“ I thought that there was a Sabbath in the heaven every seventh day while the people were assembled at church, because my mother pointed her fingers to the sky and held up her hands on each side of her head when I refused to go to church.”

“ It seemed strange to see the people assembled at church on Sunday, and to see them read their prayer-books, but I did not know to whom they prayed. I did not attend the family prayer, but when I was quite a boy I used to go to a Catholic church with my nurse, and saw the people; but I remember I was full of mischief.” (This is the boy that told his father that “ Dieu ” was very cruel.)

From the above extracts it will be seen, that most of the deaf and dumb before instruction never had any ideas whatever of the object of public or private worship, some probably taking the weekly assemblage at church as being as much a matter of course as any other periodical event; while others, if they tried to think about it, only added it to the long list of human actions which, in their darkened state, were incomprehensible to them. One or two seem to have made rather a shrewd guess at the secret motives of some outward professors when they considered public worship as a recreation, and family prayer as a play; and the idea of another, that people met to worship or to do honor to the clergyman, might in some cases be warranted by the fact. Only one bright lad seems to have connected anything like religious ideas with public worship. His mother’s signs gave him the impression that men met on the seventh day on

earth because the people in heaven, or in the sky, did the same.

To the same purport as the foregoing, on all the points we have considered, is the testimony of many other deaf-mutes as well in Europe as in America. Nor have we ever heard of any well authenticated case of a deaf-mute who gained any correct ideas on religious subjects by his own unaided powers of observation and reflection. There are some who, having been able to hear and speak in childhood, have retained, after becoming deaf, the knowledge of God, the soul, and the life to come, previously acquired; and, in very rare cases, tolerably correct ideas on such subjects have been imparted to an uneducated deaf child by a friend remarkably expert in the language of gestures. But we feel authorized by the evidence before us to deny that any deaf-mute has given evidence of having any innate or self-originating ideas of a Supreme Being to whom love and obedience were due; of a Creator, or a Superintending Providence, of spiritual existences, or of a future state of rewards and punishments. On this point we will quote the testimony of two or three eminent teachers, out of many that might be cited. The late excellent Thomas H. Gallaudet, the father of deaf-mute instruction in America, thus expresses himself: "I do not think it possible to produce the instance of a deaf-mute, from birth, who, *without instruction on the subject from some friend, or at some institution for his benefit*, has originated, from his own reflections, the idea of a Creator and moral Governor of the world, or who has formed any notions of the immateriality and immortality of his own soul."*

Equally decided is the testimony of the Rev. W. W. Turner, the present Principal of the American Asylum: "It avails little to theorize on questions of this nature, or to show by a process of reasoning, what the human mind can or can not apprehend. The fact is simply this: The most intelligent deaf-mutes, after a careful inquiry made at different stages of their education, uniformly testify that they never

* This testimony of Messrs. Gallaudet, Turner and Hutton is cited from the Twenty-second Report of the American Asylum.

had any idea of a God, or of their own soul, previous to instruction; that they either had never thought on the subject, or if they had, concluded that all things had ever been; and that death was the termination of existence."

And Mr. A. B. Hutton, the estimable Principal of the Philadelphia Institution, bears this testimony: "In the whole course of my sixteen years' experience in the instruction of deaf-mutes, I have never found any evidence for believing that the deaf and dumb from birth, possessed before instruction any idea of a spiritual, Supreme Being, who created and governs everything around us, the idea of God. I have observed that many have crude notions of a being like a man whom they conceived as dwelling in the sky, of great size, age, and muscular power, who possessed cannon to thunder with, and soldiers to flash powder for lightning, and lamps for stars; but even these conceptions they have referred to pictures and the signs of their friends as their source."

The testimony of European teachers is not less decisive than that of the Americans. As one of the most favorable to the intellectual and moral capacity of the uninstructed deaf and dumb, we will cite M. Berthier, himself a deaf-mute, and for many years a distinguished professor in the Institution of Paris. In one of his letters (as quoted by the Abbé Montaigne,) he says: "It is possible that some deaf-mutes may attribute certain effects, as storms, wind, and hail, to a certain cause, and may figure to themselves one or more extraordinary beings commanding the rain, the lightning, and other natural phenomena; but a deaf and dumb person, without instruction, will never have a notion, even vague and confused, of a superior existence, whom it is his duty to love, revere, and obey, and to whom he must give an account of his thoughts and of his actions." *

* The Abbé Montaigne, in his "Recherches sur les Connoissances intellectuelles des Sourds-Muets, considérés par rapport à l'administration des Sacrements," cites the testimony of many eminent European teachers, who, so far from supposing that the uninstructed deaf and dumb could have any idea of a Creator, or of their moral responsibility to a superior being, considered them as hardly superior, intellectually and morally, to animals or to idiots. This judgment is much too severe. Either those teachers must have expressed such opinions before

In opposition to all this mass of testimony, may be cited

they had made due inquiry into the condition of the uneducated deaf and dumb ; or they must have taken, as a general rule, some exceptional cases of deaf-mutes who had been neglected and thrust out of society.

Bébian, who was intimately and thoroughly acquainted with the language and character of the deaf and dumb, says : " The greater number of the deaf and dumb had, already before instruction, the idea, I will not say of a first cause, a notion too complicated for the feebleness of their intellect, but that of a sovereign being. They all have, if not the idea, at least the sentiment, of good and evil." And we agree with him on both points, except that, as we have shown, their ideas of a powerful being in the sky are in all cases, so far as we have any evidence, derived from the signs of their friends.

The Abbé Montaigne, holding with Bonald, that " Language is the necessary instrument of every intellectual operation, and the means of every moral existence," and that " Words are indispensable to moral ideas," naturally concludes that uninstructed deaf-mutes should not be admitted to any of the sacraments, except those (as baptism) which are ordinarily administered to infants ; and he supports his views by the authority, among other names eminent in the Catholic church, of St. Augustine, who says (lib. III. contra Julianum, cap. IV.) of the deaf from birth : " Quod vitium etiam ipsam impedit fidem ; nam surdus natus litteras, quibus lectis fidem concipiat, discere non potest."

Though one of the most venerated of the fathers has thus pronounced faith impossible to those who could neither hear nor read the word, yet many Catholic priests have endeavored to instruct deaf-mutes in the dogmas of their religion by means of signs and pictures ; and have thought the results authorized their admission to the sacraments. In many cases, probably, they have deceived themselves, as to the clearness with which their instructions were comprehended ; still their benevolence is praiseworthy, and the possibility of communicating the most elevated moral and religious ideas by means of the language of gestures will be questioned only by those who are ignorant of the power of that language. Indeed, if religious instruction must be deferred till it could be fully comprehended in words alone, it would become hopeless for a large proportion of the deaf and dumb. Many there are who leave our institutions with a very imperfect knowledge of written language, but, notwithstanding, well instructed in the leading truths of religion.

The legitimate and indeed avowed conclusion from the Abbé's doctrines is, that deaf-mutes who can not read and write, can have no moral sense, and must be classed with infants and idiots, who being incapable of sin themselves, and hence only bearing the taint of the original sin, which, according to the Romish faith, baptism washes away, are saved without religious instruction, if they have been baptized. In Italy, these conclusions have been carried out to a point which probably our Abbé would not sanction ; some Italians having opposed the instruction of deaf-mutes on the ground that, if uninstructed, not being morally accountable, their salvation was certain, whereas, if instructed, they would become morally accountable, and might incur, by their own sins, damnation. Alas for the happiness of mankind when superstition opposes by such arguments the efforts of benevolence to sweeten their bitter lot of ignorance and affliction !

the merely speculative opinion of Degerando,* that, since the deaf-mute possesses the like powers of observation and reflection with other men, he is capable, time and opportunity being granted to the development of his faculties, of arriving at the conception of "a supreme power, an intelligence that has right to our gratitude," and of divining that the worship he witnesses is offered to such a being; and the assertion of Dr. Howe, that his favorite blind and deaf-mute pupil, Laura Bridgman, "alone and unguided sought God, and found him in the Creator."

If we admit, for the argument's sake, the abstract possibility that a deaf-mute may, by the independent exercise of his own faculties, attain the conception of a Creator, to whom gratitude and obedience are due; still we must observe that the intellectual development implied in such an achievement of the reflective powers, is quite incredible, unless we suppose the possession of a language, whether of words or gestures;† and the possession of a language necessarily implies both a power and a long habit of communicating with other minds. The deaf-mute who possesses the intellectual ability to trace the Creator in his works, must, therefore, possess a corresponding ability to converse with his fellows, and, in a Christian land, unless we suppose a general conspiracy to keep him in ignorance, he can hardly possess this ability without becoming acquainted with the prevalent belief, long before he is able to work out a theology for himself.

And, in spite of Dr. Howe's assertion, which, indeed, he qualifies as "to the best of his knowledge and belief,"‡ we

* De l'Education des Sourds-Muets de Naissance (Paris, 1827,) Tome I. pp. 92, 93.

† Dr. Howe says (Report for 1843, p. 25): "The intellect can not be developed unless *all* the modifications of thought have some sign, by which they can be recalled. Hence men are compelled by a kind of inward force to form languages, and they do form them under all and every circumstance." We think, however, that, with the uneducated deaf and dumb, the development of the intellect is usually somewhat in advance of the ability to communicate with others; but by no means sufficiently so to affect the present argument.

‡ Report for 1850, p. 65.

doubt if this was not, in a good measure, the case with Laura Bridgman. Her eminent teacher wished in her case to carry out a favorite theory, that the spontaneous development of man's religious nature would lead the creature to a correct knowledge of the Creator. She had been several years under instruction, and had acquired a fair intellectual development, and, for a deaf-mute, a very considerable command of language, before her teacher made any effort to lead her thoughts to religious subjects. He then found that, having attained an "acquaintance with the extent of human creative power," she seemed conscious of "the necessity of superhuman power for the explanation of a thousand daily recurring phenomena." But is it not at least full as probable that she had unconsciously imbibed the idea of a Creator from her free communications, every day and almost every hour of the day for years, with a whole school of intelligent and well-taught blind girls? The statement that Laura "by herself conceived the existence of God," first appears, if we mistake not, in Dr. Howe's Report for 1845.* In his Report for 1843, two years earlier, he says of Laura, then in her fifth year of instruction: "The various attempts which I have made during the year to lead her thoughts to God, and spiritual affairs, have been, for the most part, forced upon me by her questions, which I am sure were prompted by expressions dropped carelessly by others; such as God, Heaven, Soul, etc., and about which she would afterwards ask me."† In the interval between the writing of these two statements, the Doctor had been absent more than a year in Europe. Is not there here room to suppose that, between zeal for a favorite theory, and just pride in the remarkable powers of his pupil, he may have overlooked the possibility, nay, the probability, of her having acquired, in familiar conversation, hints, at least, of truths which he supposed to be discoveries of her unaided intellect?

However this may be, we hold that to expect that children in general, deaf-mute or not, will, by their own unaided

* P. 29.

† Report for 1843, p. 37.

reflections, acquire correct ideas of God and immortality, because some child of very uncommon mental power and activity is supposed to have done so, is about as rational as to expect that every boy who plays with a pair of compasses may out of his own head construct thirty-two of the first problems in Euclid, because Pascal is said to have done so. Tell a bright youth that *the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles*, or that *in a right angled triangle the square of the hypotenuse equals the sum of the squares of the legs*, and, with some previous training and preparation, he may be able to construct an original demonstration; but how many out of a thousand, or even a million, if launched without a chart upon the sea of geometry, will make the independent discovery of these propositions?

Even to the mighty ones of our race, the Confuciuses, the Zoroasters, the Platos, can hardly be conceded the ability, unaided by direct revelation, to form just and ennobling conceptions of the Most High, and of man's destiny. With the great mass of mankind, their religious nature suffices to enable them to receive, and understand, and cling to a religion, but not unaided to make one; at least, one that can be, by the most liberal Christian, supposed acceptable to the Creator; else how shall we account for the gross and unworthy conceptions of God prevalent not only among nearly all rude tribes, but even among the most polished people of antiquity? It may, indeed, be said that the reverence imbibed in childhood for the faith of their fathers, prevented them from developing a more rational belief, but this argument only removes the difficulty a step further back. And, moreover, there are examples, rare it is true, of tribes not wholly destitute of intellectual power, and having at least a language far more precise and copious than is possessed by most uneducated deaf-mutes, who yet seem as utterly destitute of religious ideas as we have shown the latter to be. The devoted missionary Moffat testifies that, when he preached the existence of God and the immortality of the soul to the barbarous tribes of the Griquas and Bechuanas in South Africa, he was heard with an amazement that

found vent in bursts of deafening laughter. Such things had never, even in a shadow of tradition, been heard of among them. According to their views, death is nothing less than annihilation, and they never for a moment allow their thoughts to dwell on it.

Whatever difference of opinion may prevail as to the ability of man to form for himself a religion not altogether repugnant to reason, or in some essential points, to revelation; there is unfortunately no question as to his ability, and his strong propensity too, to materialize rather than spiritualize, the object of his worship; to make his God a being of terror and wrath rather than of love; of partiality to himself, rather than of equal justice to all men; and rather to transplant to his hoped-for heaven the sensual joys of this world than to look forward to spiritual or even intellectual enjoyment in another life. Reasoning from these well-known traits of humanity, we find it much easier to believe that what dim glimpses of religious truth are found among heathen tribes, are vestiges of a purer belief held by their remote ancestors, than that any just and ennobling religious conceptions have spontaneously been developed among such tribes.

This subject has an important practical application. The American instructors of the deaf and dumb have held it to be their duty to begin the religious instruction of their pupils at the earliest practicable stage of their education; that is to say, within the first few months or even weeks. Dr. Howe considered it his duty to defer any instruction to *Laura Bridgman* on such subjects as God and the Soul, to the fifth year of her instruction, and then it was forced upon him by her having picked up notions on such subjects in casual conversations. His reasons we suppose were, that such ideas should not be presented till the pupil has attained a stage of intellectual development that will enable him fully to comprehend them, and that he should even rather be led to make such ideas his own by right of discovery, than to have them presented as dogmas which he must accept. Much of this difference of practice is to be ascribed to the

difference of circumstances, and of plans of instruction. On Dr. Howe's plan, perhaps the best which the peculiar case he had to deal with admitted, he had no means of intellectual intercourse with his pupil, and the pupil no means of intellectual development except by a language of words, the acquisition of which, for deaf mutes, is always slow and laborious. On the system prevailing in our institutions for the deaf and dumb, the teacher can, at a very early stage of instruction, reach the understanding, the heart, and the conscience of his pupil through the latter's own language of pantomime. And when the deaf-mute pupil first finds himself in a community where every one talks his own language, in an improved dialect, the development of his hitherto dormant faculties makes as much progress in a few months as it probably would in as many years were he rigorously confined to words, written or spelled on his fingers, as the signs of ideas, and the means of social intercourse. This preference for signs, indeed, sometimes causes our pupils to neglect and forget words; still the use of signs has great and positive advantages as a *means* (not as some have strangely supposed, an *end*) of instruction.

It is this ability which, if our pupils do not bring to school with them, they very soon acquire, to converse on intellectual and moral subjects in the language of gestures, that enables us to begin their religious instruction so early. The teacher, in a numerous class of newly arrived deaf mutes, is almost precisely in the condition of a missionary to some tribe of heathens. He must first learn their language, and after seek to make it better adapted to the communication of spiritual ideas, but he need not and does not defer the preaching of the Gospel till they can learn his own language.

Moreover, in a numerous class, early religious instruction is necessary to moral control over the pupils. The uneducated deaf and dumb, if they have no religious ideas, still have a moral sense, a sense of right and wrong, as regards the relations of property, and certain other important checks on the animal propensities. But this moral sense, unsustained by any feeling of accountability to an almighty, just,

and omniscient God, is at best, weak and dim. And there are not wanting those among them in whom the moral sentiments have been designedly perverted by vicious associates. When the teacher has to deal with but one or two pupils, and can guard against evil communications, watchfulness and correct example may be sufficient to preserve or restore moral purity, till the time comes when the teacher may think his pupil intellectually ripe for the reception of doctrines that may supply higher motives to virtue. But in the case of a whole community, some of the members of which there is reason to fear, may be already corrupt, there is an evident necessity to invoke, at the earliest possible period, that consciousness of God's all-seeing eye, and wholesome fear of his sure, if slow, justice, by which men in general are restrained from gross transgressions. And the facts and reasonings presented in this Article tend to show that this plan, not the less a sound one we conceive because sanctioned by the practice of the wise and pious for so many centuries, is, also, in most cases, the sure one. Deaf mutes readily accept religious truths offered to their yet unprejudiced belief. We have no satisfactory evidence that any of them, even after considerable mental culture, have, in their own vague seekings for the causes of things and the future destiny of man, attained unaided the truth. If we leave them uninstructed on such points till the latter part of an ordinary course of instruction, not a few may be taken from our care before that important part of education is reached; and those who remain to the end will be in danger of picking up, by reading and conversation, false and absurd notions, which it may be difficult afterward to eradicate.

Another cogent consideration, in favor of the early inculcation of religious truth, is found in its influence on the development of character. We do not consider religion as merely some higher science, to be reserved to the closing years of education,—the capital which is to crown the column. On the contrary, we hold to the good old belief, that children should be brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; that the precept of Moses is still applica-

ble: "Command your children to observe to do all the words of this law; for it is not a vain thing for you, because it is your life."* We can not leave our children ignorant of the observances of public and private worship, and would not if we could. And we must either leave them to suppose that they are a mere recreation or a "play," or we must teach them that these observances have a deep and solemn significance.

History teaches us that the religion of a nation influences the formation and development of the national character. The nations of Europe and America are not Christian because they are the most enlightened races of mankind, but they are the most enlightened because they are Christian. As with a race so with an individual. A pure and elevated religious faith, either originally accepted through the evidence of miracles, and from its own excellency, or impressed by parental teaching in infancy, tends to purify and elevate the individual as well as the national character. When the Divine law is made the rule of conscience, the tone of private and public morals is higher, and there are stronger safeguards against secret transgressions than when the formation of the moral character is left to the natural development of a happy constitution of the moral sentiments. May the time come when no child in the world, whether deaf-mute or not, shall grow up without knowledge of his Creator.

* Deut. 32: 46, 47.

